

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

18 June 2013

### HND104464.FE

Honduras: Areas where gangs operate (2012 - June 2013)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Number of gang members

A US Agency for International Development (USAID) report indicates that, in 2012, the number of gang members in Honduras could reach approximately 35,000 (U.S. Nov. 2012). The National Programme of Prevention, Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration (Programa Nacional de Prevención, Rehabilitación y Reinserción Social - PNPRRS), a government organization (Honduras n.d.a.), noted in 2002 that the number of gang members in Honduras was estimated at 36,000 (ibid. [2012], 24). A 2012 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report indicates that the alleged number of maras members in Honduras is 12,000 (United Nations Sept. 2012, 27-28). The UNODC further indicates that, according to local law enforcement organizations, out of every 100,000 people in Honduras, there are 149 maras members (ibid., 29). A study on the maras and other gangs conducted between September 2010 and January 2011 by the PNPRRS reports that there are allegedly 4,281 members in the 14 cities featured in the study, and that, based on police data, 447 other gang members were in detention in January 2011 (Honduras [2012], 25). The PNPRRS report recorded the following number of gang members in the 14 cities featured in the study:

City	Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)	Pandilla 18 (M-18)	Mara 61	Mara Organizada Gánster	West Side	Total
San Pedro Sula	1 334	1 242	-	-	-	2 576
Tegucigalpa	408	480	-	-	-	888
Puerto Cortés	16	15	-	-	-	31
Choloma	42	50	-	-	-	92
Villanueva	90	-	-	-	-	90
La Lima	-	43	-	-	-	43
El Progreso	25	-	-	-	-	25
La Ceiba	63	156	-	-	-	219
Tela	47	-	-	-	-	47
Jutiapa	-	10	-	-	-	10
Roatán	39	13	-	38	25	115
Tocoa	-	-	67	-	-	67
Danli	15	19	-	-	-	34
El Paraiso	15	19	-	-	-	34

(ibid., 70-75)

The study indicates that [translation] "the illegality and secrecy surrounding these groups makes it difficult to ascertain an accurate number of group members" (ibid.). Similarly, *La Prensa* quotes an official from the US Department

of State who works on topics that concern the maras as saying that [translation] "it is very difficult to determine the number of gang members because many of them live underground. ...there are many of them, and there are more gang members than police officers in Central America" (30 May 2012).

## 2. Areas of gang presence

Media sources report that the maras are mostly present in urban centres (United Nations Sept. 2012, 27-28; *La Prensa* 6 May 2013; Independent Researcher 7 June 2013). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an independent researcher with a Ph.D. in political science from the Free University of Berlin, who published articles on gangs in Honduras, states that the gangs are also present in the border areas (ibid.). The maras are particularly present in the cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula (United Nations Sept. 2012, 28; *La Prensa* 7 May 2013). According to *La Prensa*, a San Pedro Sula newspaper, the maras are also involved in extortion in La Ceiba, Comayagua, Tela, Santa Rosa de Copán and El Progreso (ibid.). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative from the National Commission for Human Rights (Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos - CONADEH) of Honduras, the organization responsible for [translation] "ensuring the rights and freedoms under the Constitution" (Honduras n.d.b), noted that gangs are present throughout the country, especially in the major cities (ibid. 11 June 2013).

The independent researcher reports that there is no information to indicate the presence of gangs in rural communities or in the department of Intibucá (7 June 2013). However, the CONADEH representative reports that gangs are present in rural areas, though in small numbers, and that according to the information provided by other CONADEH representatives and by the Commission in Intibucá, [translation] "[gang victims] who sought refuge in rural areas were found and killed" (Honduras 11 June 2013). According to the representative, the presence of an individual in a rural area would be noticed because the residents in these locations know one another (ibid.). The independent researcher stated that, [translation] "generally, a person who is being pursued by the maras will not take refuge in the country, but will seek to leave the country" (11 June 2013). The CONADEH representative also reports that victims will seek a way to leave the country (Honduras 11 June 2013). The representative notes that minors who have left the country for the US and who are arrested in Mexico [translation] "ask the Mexican authorities not to deport them to Honduras because they will be killed there for having refused to join the maras" (ibid. 7 June 2013).

According to a United States Congressional Research Service report, the maras have expanded their territory in Central America (US 28 Jan. 2013, 4). Similarly, a *La Prensa* article reports the growing presence of gangs in Honduras (7 May 2013). A USAID report indicates that "the gangs' control over the majority of the country's territory is increasingly alarming as their criminal activities extend beyond extortion" (US Nov. 2012). The report also indicates that both the MS-13 and M-18 "are evolving, becoming more organized and establishing new systems of operations, communications and finances" (ibid.). *La Prensa* reports that even if the gangs started out as a [translation] "neighbourhood phenomena, they now have national influence. At the same time, they have increased their power and their criminal activity zones" (29 May 2012). Moreover, according to the UNODC report, "Mara members are arrested in some of the most unlikely places, often in areas with very little street crime" in the Northern Triangle, which include Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (United Nations Sept. 2012, 16, 67-69). A May 2013 *La Prensa* article reports that complaints were made regarding extortion and murder in the areas of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, which were not previously among their zones of influence (7 May 2013).

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that, following the imposition of a curfew by the maras in an area of Tegucigalpa, there were no complaints regarding threats from maras, and that the chief of police stated that "people may be keeping quiet out of fear" (4 Feb. 2013). *La Prensa* quotes a carrier from San Pedro Sula who stated that [translation] "'we are not filing reports because we do not know if the person whom we will report is an extortionist or a murderer'" (*La Prensa* 7 May 2013). *La Prensa* also refers to the case of a merchant who was allegedly murdered by the maras less than 24 hours after reporting that he had been a victim of extortion (ibid.). The merchant's family stated that the gangs returned a few days after the funeral for the purposes of extortion, after having threatened to kill them (ibid.).

## 3. Truce

Media sources report that leaders of the MS-13 and the M-18 announced on May 28, 2013, from prison in San Pedro Sula, that they wanted to call a truce and end the violence (Al Jazeera 28 May 2013; BBC 28 May 2013). The bishop of San Pedro Sula, who facilitated the reconciliation between the two gangs, stated that this does not mean that an agreement of peace has been reached (ibid.; CNA 3 June 2013). The Catholic News Agency, a Catholic media agency (CNA n.d.), quotes the bishop, who stated that the gangs continue to be at war for the time being and that a peace project is "a long process that could go on for decades" (ibid. 3 June 2013).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to reach representatives from the Honduran Secretaría de Seguridad Pública were unsuccessful.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Catholic Relief Services; Council on Hemispheric Affairs; eoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; *El Herald*; Honduras – Secretaría de Gobernación y Justicia; Human Rights Watch; InSight Crime; International Crisis Group; International Federation of Human Rights; International Relations and Security Network; *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*; Organization of American States; *Prensa Libre*; United Nations – Refworld; United States – Department of State, Overseas Security Advisory Council; Washington Office on Latin America.

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